

## A brief history of women

By Chieh Wu

Most men understand women the way they understand machines, as long as you follow a set of functional rules, the cars will never stall, the computer programs will always run and it will never ask you for more attention. Even concept as complicated as the theory of relativity could be reduced down to  $E = mc^2$ . This method has worked well since the beginning of time as long as we keep adding new rules when older ones were broken. Unfortunately, none of these endeavor had any success in understanding women. A reporter once asked the most famous contemporary physicist Steven Hawkins about what the most complicated thing he has encountered. Without hesitation, he replied that it was women. Even the most famous psychologist Freud died never answering the question of "what women want?"

The purpose of this paper is to answer the question, but not in what Freud or Steven Hawkins had in mind. Women are not machines and no finite

amount of rules will ever completely describe them. But rather, I will present the history of women as well as their personal writings to demonstrate why they think the way they do. After, I will describe the interaction before men and women and explain why there exist so much confusion between the two sex. Lastly, I will delve into the social implications of feminism and women in the society.

The first excerpt is from the Lost Book of Lilith. Men misunderstanding women dated itself all the way back to the creation of Adam and Lilith. Depending on your background you might be wondering who Lilith is. Wasn't it Adam and Eve you might ask. Lilith is actually a mythical figure that existed as the first woman before Eve. There's been an on going debate over the existence of Lilith. Although the controversy is outside the scope of this paper, the story itself is still a note worthy example of the misunderstanding between men and women even today.

## The Lost Book of Lilith

Rachel S. Havrelock

Perhaps it is a seedy story I tell, one that will shock you. Often the people with the loftiest thoughts have formed them in shadows. Descendants, however, like to think of their ancestors as clean, so some things are left out of history. Should I dispel the myth? Come out from my guises and admit. For many the third beating may be too late. Several of the times I have been abused I have been amazed that I have remained alive. Imagine that I have been thrown to a very hard slate floor several times, kicked in the abdomen, the head, and the chest, and still remained alive!

What determines who is lucky and who isn't? I could have been dead a long time ago had I been hit the wrong way. My baby could have been killed or deformed had I been kicked the wrong way. What saved me?

I don't know. I only know that it has happened and that each night I dread the final blow that will kill me and leave my children motherless. I hope I can hang on until I complete my education, get a good job, and become self-sufficient enough to care for my children on my own.

that creation is not as easy as you would believe? Are you prepared to entertain more than the idea of one man and one woman?

My life began in a garden. Not a tended one with flowers in

neat rows, but a dynamic wilderness where earth was still struggling to pull itself away from water. The plants were various, but alike in their newness. We came into being in the same instant, made from the same fire and air. When we first turned to regard each other, his feet were planted in soil and mine in water. We stood close, but still the boundary between the elements was clear. We stayed so long gazing at one another that our eyes did what language later would. He was spectacular to behold: the expansive flat chest, sharp green eyes, dark skin. Looking at him contained elements of looking at a reflection, but I knew that he was different from me. My first moment of being was entwined with his first moment of being.

Finally, he said, "I am Adam." "Lilith, I am," I said and stepped out of the water toward him. Adam jumped back. "I am Lilith," I said, standing still and staring at him. "Lilith, I see," he said circling around my body and inspecting me. I turned quickly, placed my hands on his shoulders and walked him backward to the water. When his feet touched the water, they slipped out from under him and soon he was floating. He looked about himself quizzically and showed all the signs of being uncomfortable. I dove down and began to push myself through the water. "Where are you going?" Adam called out to me. Out there, I yelled back to him. "Lilith, come back."

I returned although I wasn't finished and went with the earthman back to his land. On the dry part of the island, we continued our explorations. We lay in the pale green of meadows, ate sweet fleshy fruits whose seeds stuck in our teeth, and followed the four rivers in the hope of finding their end. When it seemed that the rivers did not cease, the day unfolded into night. When darkness fell, I felt more at ease in

the garden. Great possibility lurked between the shadows of the taller trees. I got up to run into the night and greet what waited for me, but Adam took hold of my hand. "Wait for the lights," he said, his voice causing the night to darken.

He advised patience with such authority that I assumed he saw things which I did not see. When the tiny lights emerged from the darkness, I beheld motion that seemed beyond my form. So many small lights came out of the blanket of darkness that when the great orb appeared, Adam and I turned to each other and held in one another's warmth with our arms. A rich, wet smell of earth rose up to us.

"I have a story to tell you," Adam said, stroking the hair out of my face. "On the fourth day of creation before we came into being, The Creator made two great orbs. The bright, brilliant one is called the sun and it is male, like me. The other orb is called the moon. She is a woman who changes her mind all the time. In the beginning, the sun and moon were equal and stayed in the sky together all the time, but the moon was jealous of the sun's radiance and began to speak badly of him. When The Creator heard her words, he hurled her down from her original height. The moon could no longer generate her own light, only reflect that of the sun. She fell into night over which she still reigns. When she fell, tiny threads of light were loosed from her body. These are the stars."

I looked at the sky and found that Adam's story was true. The almost circular moon illuminated the night and breathed life into it. She dispersed the blanket of darkness into a play of light and shadow. Hidden aspects of the garden were conjured as she smiled on us with celestial coolness. The stars shone with her example. She was their source. Adam and I slept side by side with his arms draped over me. I felt where his breath began and how it traveled into me. My breath reached out of me and

likewise entered him. We lay together, a cycle of breath, until the night orb was replaced by the day one.

I remember that night and the next day as the golden time. I am not sure if time was different then, longer and more fluid, or if my memory has elongated what transpired. When the day orb rose, I opened my eyes directly into his. Our bodies were warm and unified, still whole after the darkness. At that moment, there was nothing beyond the embrace. The garden was inside of us. The beauty and connection which surrounded us made us up. When we stood, we were embraced by the garden and held together by its morning mist. As we walked, an invisible force bound us.

Exploring the terrain of the garden was a process of self-discovery. The pools interspersed throughout the garden suggested that water was inside me. The trees created a shade which pointed to a shadow within. Tasting the fruits was tasting Adam and the earth under our feet was the stuff of our bodies. The hum of insects and animals was the rhythm of our thoughts. My sense of being one component of a complex system filled me with security. When I close my eyes, I can easily recall the garden, but the feeling of being inside of it is one that I suspect will not return.

The problems began the next day when Adam began the task of naming things. That morning, he did not lie still gazing at me. He told me that The Creator had commanded him to bring order to the garden through names. I laughed and told Adam that to name things would separate them, impose division. I questioned his creator's intentions. Before, I hadn't been sure, but I now knew that Adam and I came from two separate forces working together. We were different beings with divergent forms and purposes. The Creatrix had never said anything to me about names. I found the idea absurd.

Adam stared at me proposing challenge. "You are woman." The sense that our words could have different intentions excited me.

I felt a new sensation pulse through my body. I stepped back, "I'm Lilith, do you know me?" His green eyes lit up, "I called you woman." We were using words to talk about words, but I knew that what we were really saying had nothing to do with them. The sounds meeting in air were a prelude to our bodies meeting in ways that they had not, as of yet, met. "Your names will not change a thing," I said defiantly and raised one side of my mouth into a smile. Adam's gaze turned from seductive to serious, "I have a job to do. There is a system to create."

I looked around me at the low hanging trees and high reaching grasses. A system was at work all around us, inside of us. "Adam, you are trying to grasp things which cannot be held." He looked at me with fury, "You do not understand. You are woman." Adam walked away and went about his task of naming. It was so apparently foolish to me that I expected him to soon understand the futility of his labor. I went to one of the pools to bathe. As I swam, I searched the waters for what The Creatrix intended for me. I moved through the water as the water moved me on its currents. This surrender and exchange was what the garden expected from me. When I finished swimming, I lay on the shore of the water staring up. My body absorbed the sun and winds of the garden. I thought of how Adam and I could be like the sun and wind wrapping themselves together to become air. I wanted to feel again the way I had when Adam challenged

me. In the deepest hot of the day, Adam approached. When he stood over me, I knew the shadow was his. I was sure that he was all done naming and was ready to swim and lie beside me.

"Woman, there you are lying down the way you are supposed to," he said. I opened my eyes and saw the rich tones of his skin gleaming in the sun. The curves of his body appeared rounded and smooth, the embodiment of Eden. "I am lying," I answered him. "You lie down and I will lie on top of you," he said with authority. I was not quick to forget how excited the mutual

challenge of the morning had made me. "No, I said, you lie down and I will lie on top of you." I looked up at him and lifted my eyebrows. Adam was angry. "You lie under me and I lie on top. That is the way the system works." From what I had heard about his system, it was ridiculous. Why did the garden need names and why did who got to be on top and who on the bottom have to be a rule? "Why don't we work together to make the system work?", I suggested.

Adam was clearly not playing, I named you, he said as a slate gray color flashed in his green eyes. "I gave you identity and for this, you must lie down." Throughout this conversation, Adam failed to notice that I was already lying down. If he had just gotten on top of me without having to insist that he was doing it, everything would have been fine. "I must not do anything," I said and rose to my feet. The gray in his eyes sharpened, "This is how it's meant to be."

I pitied Adam. In his assertion of dominion, he seemed small and fragmented. He was losing sight of what the garden was. I lowered my voice to a firm whisper, "No lying is going to take place." Adam's face changed. He stared into me as if I had been made only to be conquered. His arms tensed and no longer appeared to me as the wings which kept me warm at night. They seemed more final than the rivers which surrounded the garden. A sense of despair washed over me as I realized that this beautiful man, this earthman and his body could be nothing but my prison. "Lie down," he said. "How can you say that to me?" "That is the way it is, you lie down for me." "I want to be on top", I said defiantly. "You were created to be on the bottom", he answered. The burning started in my stomach and moved through my heart up to my throat. My legs shook with the desire for motion, to be gone suddenly and forever. But, I knew that my legs could not carry me as rapidly or as far as I wanted to go. That was what he thought of me, the bottom. Not a temporary or sometimes bottom, but a form intended to be

forever beneath him. We could never look at each other as we had on the first day. The garden lost all of its beauty. It became a landscape of confinement as I became aware not of the pools and trees, but of the wall which surrounded it. My salvation lay in escape. The need to leave was so complete and absolute that I pulled the words from the abyss within. Adam had begun a war of language. If he could use words to place me beneath him, then I would use them to disappear.

I howled them, the secret words of God, Her Name which echoed through me and filled the garden with its power. The Name of God. Her Name. The Name. "Let me go!" When I brought my head down from the scream, I had sprouted wings. Two sheer, black wings which shimmered in the sun. My body looked altogether different. I turned to Adam, said goodbye, lifted my wings into the air and felt my feet lift off of the ground. The higher I got, the smaller Adam became. Who was on the bottom now? .....

for the rest of the story visit:

<http://www.lilithinstitute.com/lostbook.htm>

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## Part 1: Women's fear

Let's be honest, has men changed much in our patriarchy society since the time of Adam? It is almost pathetic that even with all our technological advances and social reforms, today domestic violence is higher than ever. Men hit women not because they are always right but because they can. Much like how Adam felt, it is ingrained in most modern societies that men have the right to discipline their wives. It almost becomes a power struggle to have the say in a relationship. This brings up the first point that women consciously or subconsciously have deep entrenched fear of being physically abused. The following excerpt will give you an insight as to why being physically or mentally abused is such a fear among women.

## **A Letter from a Battered Wife**

Excerpted from the book **BATTERED WIVES**  
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### **A friend of mine received the following letter after discussing wife-beating at a public meeting.**

I am in my thirties and so is my husband. I have a high school diploma and am presently attending a local college, trying to obtain the additional education I need. My husband is a college graduate and a professional in his field. We are both attractive and, for the most part, respected and well-liked. We have four children and live in a middle-class home with all the comforts we could possibly want.

I have everything, except life without fear.

For most of my married life I have been periodically beaten by my husband. What do I mean by "beaten"? I mean that parts of my body have been hit violently and repeatedly, and that painful bruises, swelling, bleeding wounds, unconsciousness, and combinations of these things have resulted.

Beating should be distinguished from all other kinds of physical abuse-including being hit and shoved around. When I say my husband threatens me with abuse I do not mean he warns me that he may lose control. I mean that he shakes a fist against my face or nose, makes punching-bag jabs at my shoulder, or makes similar gestures which may quickly turn into a full-fledged beating.

I have had glasses thrown at me. I have been kicked in the abdomen when I was visibly pregnant. I have been kicked off the bed and hit while lying on the floor - again, while I was pregnant. I have been whipped, kicked and thrown, picked up again and thrown down again. I have been punched and kicked in the head, chest, face, and abdomen

more times than I can count.

I have been slapped for saying something about politics, for having a different view about religion, for swearing, for crying, for wanting to have intercourse. I have been threatened when I wouldn't do something he told me to do. I have been threatened when he's had a bad day and when he's had a good day. I have been threatened, slapped and beaten after stating bitterly that I didn't like what he was doing with another woman.

After each beating my husband has left the house and remained away for days. Few people have ever seen my black and blue face or swollen lips because I have always stayed indoors afterwards, feeling ashamed. I was never able to drive following one of these beatings, so I could not get myself to a hospital for care. I could never have left my young children alone, even if I could have driven a car.

Hysteria inevitably sets in after a beating. This hysteria - the shaking and crying and mumbling-is not accepted by anyone, so there has never been anyone to call.

My husband on a few occasions did phone a day or so later so we could agree on the excuse I would use for returning to work, the grocery store, the dentist appointment, and so on. I used the excuses-car accident, oral surgery, things like that.

Now, the first response to this story, which I myself think of, will be, "Why didn't you seek help?"

I did. Early in our marriage we went to a clergyman who, after a few visits, told me that my husband meant no real harm, that he was just confused and felt insecure. I was encouraged to be more tolerant and understanding. Most

important, I was told to forgive him the beating just as Christ had forgiven me from the cross. I did that, too.

Things continued. Next time I turned to a doctor I was given little pills to relax me and told to take things a little easier. I was just too nervous.

I turned to a friend, and when her husband found out, he accused me of either making things up or exaggerating the situation. She was told to stay away from me. She didn't, but she could no longer really help me. Just by believing me she was made to feel disloyal.

I turned to a professional family guidance agency. I was told there that my husband needed help and that I should find a way to control the incidents. I couldn't control the beatings-that was the whole point of my seeking help. At the agency I found I had to defend myself against the suspicion that I wanted to be hit, that I invited the beatings. Good God! Did the Jews invite themselves to be slaughtered in Germany?

I did go to two more doctors. One asked me what I had done to provoke my husband. The other asked if we had made up yet.

I called the police one time. They not only did not respond to the call, they called several hours later to ask if things had "settled down." I could have been dead by then!

I have nowhere to go if it happens again. No one wants to take in a woman with four children. Even if there were someone kind enough to care, no one wants to become involved in what is commonly referred to as a "domestic situation."

Everyone I have gone to for help has somehow

wanted to blame me and vindicate my husband. I can see it lying there between their words and at the end of their sentences. The clergyman, the doctor, the counselor, my friend's husband, the police-all of them have found a way to vindicate my husband.

No one has to "provoke" a wife-beater. He will strike out when he's ready and for whatever reason he has at the moment.

I may be his excuse, but I have never been the reason.

I know that I do not want to be hit. I know, too, that I will be beaten again unless I can find a way out for myself and my children. I am terrified for them also.

As a married woman I have no recourse but to remain in the situation which is causing me to be painfully abused. I have suffered physical and emotional battering and spiritual rape because the social structure of my world says I cannot do anything about a man who wants to beat me .... But staying with my husband means that my children must be subjected to the emotional battering caused when they see their mother's beaten face or hear her screams in the middle of the night.

I know that I have to get out. But when you have nowhere to go, you know that you must go on your own and expect no support. I have to be ready for that. I have to be ready to support myself and the children completely, and still provide a decent environment for them. I pray that I can do that before I am murdered in my own home.

I have learned that no one believes me and that I cannot depend on any outside help. All I have left is the hope

that I can get away before it is too late.

I have learned also that the doctors, the police, the clergy, and my friends will excuse my husband for distorting my face, but won't forgive me for looking bruised and broken. The greatest tragedy is that am still praying, and there is not a human person to listen.

Being beaten is a terrible thing; it is most terrible of all if you are not equipped to fight back. I recall an occasion when I tried to defend myself and actually tore my husband's shirt. Later, he showed it to a relative as proof that I had done something terribly wrong. The fact that at that moment I had several raised spots on my head hidden by my hair, a swollen lip that was bleeding, and a severely damaged cheek with a blood clot that caused a permanent dimple didn't matter to him. What mattered was that I tore his shirt! That I tore it in self defense didn't mean anything to him.

My situation is so untenable I would guess that anyone who has not experienced one like it would find it incomprehensible. I find it difficult to believe myself.

It must be pointed out that while a husband can beat, slap, or threaten his wife, there are "good days." These days tend to wear away the effects of the beating. They tend to cause the wife to put aside the traumas and look to the good - first, because there is nothing else to do; second, because there is nowhere and no one to turn to; and third, because the defeat is the beating and the hope is that it will not happen again. When it does, she simply hopes again, until it becomes obvious after a third beating that there is no hope. That is when she turns outward for help to find an answer. When that help is denied, she either resigns herself to the situation she is in or pulls herself together and starts making



plans for a future life that includes only herself and her children.

For many the third beating may be too late. Several of the times I have been abused I have been amazed that I have remained alive. Imagine that I have been thrown to a very hard slate floor several times, kicked in the abdomen, the head, and the chest, and still remained alive!

What determines who is lucky and who isn't? I could have been dead a long time ago had I been hit the wrong way. My baby could have been killed or deformed had I been kicked the wrong way. What saved me?

I don 't know. I only know that it has happened and that each night I dread the final blow that will kill me and leave my children motherless. I hope I can hang on until I complete my education, get a good job, and become self-sufficient enough to care for my children on my own.

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## Fear of not being accepted

Living in this society, most women unfortunately buys into this system and accepts their secondary role behind men. Women that rejected the stereotype and rejected being a “good girl” faced punishments. For example, a women that has been with many men are referred to as sluts. A women that has too much opinion is a bitch. A women with too much ambition is not wanted and not attractive.

These unspoken standards are cross culture and religion. Women all over the world are forced into conformity. To be accepted, they must do what everyone else expects. This acceptance, by her close friends, her family, her society, is extremely important to most women.

Throughout history, women survived by helping each other. While men are more individualistic being warriors and hunters, women worked in groups and supported each other. While all the men go off to wars, women helped women watching babies and provided emotional support during times of depression and loneliness.

Perhaps one of the most prominent modern example of how women interact is the popular show “Sex and the City.” Whenever a character run into a problem, they always resorted it by talking during

their *ritual gatherings*. The support became a place where women get to vent their anger, cry on a shoulder and even compare penis sizes and stupidity of their partners.

The societal impact on women is enormous, many of the social problems today such as anorexia, and bulimia all have their roots in what the society expect of them. With magazines like Vogue and Seventeen, they essentially are brainwashing a new generation of girls to conform into what they should look like and what is *beautiful*. These magazines act as a constant reinforcement of making young girls conform into one single stereotype. Like any system with a long enough history, women within the system view women outside as a abnormality and often express their negative feeling about the deviation. While women care about what men think of them, most women fear what other women think. Women are extremely critical of each other. Because they are so critical, this also acts as a self check to make sure they themselves don't step out of line. With all these factors, they contribute to the second fear that controls their actions and reactions. The fear of not being accepted by other women.

The next excerpt by Anastasia Higginbotham is about how the magazine companies give young girls today a mix message of what the society expect of them.

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**By Anastasia Higginbotham**

Teen Mags: How To Get A Guy, Drop 20 Pounds, and Lose your Self\_esteem

I used to be the teen magazine market's ideal consumer: vain, terribly insecure, white, and middle class. I craved affection and approval from boys (often at the expense of meaningful relationships with girls), spent far too much time staring at myself in the mirror, and trusted the magazines' advice on all sorts of really, really important issues, like lip gloss and luv.

I plastered my family's refrigerator with pictures of models I'd torn out of YM, Seventeen, Sassy, and Teen, and also Vogue, Cosmopolitan, and Mademoiselle- a strategy I used to remind me not to eat. I hoped they would inspire me to do great things, like be in a David Lee Roth video. I wish I were kidding.

Though this characterization might lead you to believe I was kind of a doorknob, I assure you I was merely acting like most girls my age at whom these magazines are directed, aspiring to an ideal that I knew would bring me much success in the social world. In my first 14 years. I learned that the pretty girl who knows how to play the game wins the prize.

The “prize” being older, cooler, all-star boyfriends, multiple mentions and pictures throughout the school yearbook, and seasonal dubbings as makeshift teen royalty (Homecoming Queen, May Queen, blow-job queen, and so on). And so I absorbed the rules of the game, with teen magazines serving as a reliable source of that information.

Ten years later, I pore over these magazines to see what they're telling girls today. As I flip through the pages of YM, Seventeen, Sassy, and Teen, my blood begins to boil and my eyes cloud with anger: teen magazines make millions off girls by assuming that girls need improving, and then telling girls how to make themselves prettier, cooler, and better. Has anything changed?

As horrified as I am by these magazines, I cannot deny their ranging success. Seventeen and YM (which used to stand for Young Miss and now stand Young and Modern) rake in nearly two million subscriptions each from their teen-to-early-twenties market. Teen and Sassy with readerships of 1.3 million and 800,000 respectively, cater to the younger end of the spectrum.

In each of the magazines, cover lines offer girls “Model hair: how to get it,” “Boy magnet beauty,” “Your looks: what they say about you,” and “Mega makeovers: go from so-so to super sexy.” Their image of the ideal girl is evidenced by the cover models: white, usually blond, and invariable skinny.

When I asked why this is, Caroline Miller, editor in chief of Seventeen, explained, “There's a traditional expectation that African Americans don't sell magazines.” Seventeen has recently tested this proposition (which, by the way, fails to address the invisibility of Asian and Native American models) by featuring pop star Brandy on its April cover and another African American model on October's cover. October sold just as well as the typical white model cover, while the Brandy cover was possibly Seventeen's best selling April issue ever. Despite Seventeen's best selling April issue ever, well-intentioned editors at other magazines like Teen and Sassy compromised by featuring some white-looking black model in a month that typically has the worst sales. Meanwhile, YM would probably be satisfied with a different shot of Drew Barrymore each month.

In the wake of Sassy's transmogrification from bold, feminist teen mag into dumbed down, superficial teen rag, Seventeen, under Miller, has taken up the Sassy mantle with smart stories about interracial dating, student activists, and African American girls body image. YM, on the other hand, offers nothing more than bullshit and bad advice, and Teen is not much better. The new Sassy lacks much of the brains, courage, and wit of the old Sassy; something that its editors, tragically, see as a good thing.

Just what are the messages in the teen

magazines? A series of catch 22s -ugliness is next to nothingness and a girl with insufficient interest in boys is referred to as a "deserted island," yet one who is too sexy is also in trouble. For instance, April 1995 Sassy warns girls to watch who they flirt with because men cannot distinguish between harmless flirting and full on pass. According to Sassy, while a girl is flirting, "there's always a chance[men are] wondering what you look like without your cloth on." This mentality is used to justify the behavior of grown men who "get a little carried away sometimes" and harass, insult, and assault young women. A girl who bears the responsibility of attracting every "hottie" on the beach, but if one of them jumps her, well then, it sucks to be her. Using Sassy's logic, that girl should have known she was dealing with a potential psychopath.

YM echoes this sentiment in the July 1995 episode of "Love Crisis," a column in which Editor in Chief Sally Lee solves "agonizing love problems." A girl reveals that she was invited by her boyfriend to a party that turned out to be just him and his two male friends. They got her really drunk and she "ended up .. having sex with all of them!" She writes, "I feel so dirty... How could I have been so stupid?" The letter is signed "Mortified." YM apparently wonders the same thing: a caption on the page with her letter reads "Wake up and face the facts:you made a pretty big mistake." Lee then chastises the girl for underage

drinking and not asserting herself.

Even if the girl has not actually been gang-raped, Lee's complete disregard for a girl who was tricked and humiliated by her boyfriend and his friends is unforgivable. YM shamelessly promotes boy catching tactics with articles like "the ultimate get a guy guide," then acts surprised, even judgmental, when the tricks actually worked. Girls are bombarded with messages about the thrill of catching boys, so why is it so shocking when a girl's pursuit includes a little creative compromise, like forgiving her boyfriend for lying about the party, drinking when he tells her to drink, and being too drunk to care when he and his friends fuck her? YM shows girls 100 asinine ways to be super sexy and then provides them with no follow up skills, self-defense, or self esteem as if ignorance will keep them from going all the way. If YM ever changes its name again, I suggest Dicktease.

Likewise, when it comes to body image, teen magazines send a convoluted message. Girls are encouraged to love their bodies, no matter what they look like, by magazines with fashion spreads featuring only stick thin, flawless faced white models in expensive outfits. Granted, there is that one light skinned black girl in every fashion layout. But she's just as thin as the white girls standing next to her, and that white girl is always there like a chaperone. Like it's the white girl's responsibility to keep the black girl in line, make sure she doesn't mingle with

the other black folks, start a riot or something. The black model doesn't have any black girlfriends; she's the lucky if she gets a similarly nonthreatening black boyfriend for the prom. Maybe they think if they surround her with enough white people no one will even notice she's black.

The thin factor is equally dismaying. While the old Sassy strictly enforced a no-diet policy, forbidding publication of any and all diet advice, the new Sassy eats it up. Catherine Ettlinger, until recently the editorial director of the new Sassy, rejects the connection between articles offering diet tips and girls' obsession with thinness: "We present them with options. "If you want to eat more low fat stuff, here's some information; if you don't fine."

If it were that simple, girls would not be getting sick. In a culture that all but demands that a woman weigh no more than 120 pounds, girls do not want more diet advices. Girls do not need more low fat options, nor do they need to learn how to shed or hide "excess fat." Similarly, when Teen, YM, and Seventeen take a turn on the self love/body- pride trip, they tend to fall flat on their faces. Photos that accompany the stories typically depict a model-who isn't the least bit fat. Readers are supposed to empathize with girls who weigh 125 pounds but who are afraid to put on a bathing suit, exposing what they perceive to be huge thighs and bulging stomachs. Girls are reminded that because of their

"low self-esteem", they imagine their bodies to be much larger than they actually are. So, if they can get over that self-esteem thing and realize that they are not fat, they have nothing to worry about.

While body hatred of this type is epidemic, presenting body image as being about thin girls who think they're fat does nothing to undermine the essential prejudice against fatness, especially fat women. Is a fat girl beautiful? Should she worry? If she relies on these magazines for affirmation of her self-worth, yes, she should. And so should we.

Teen magazines' glorification of boy focused, looks based, prom obsessed idiocy reinforces every negative stereotype that has ever been used to justify-and ensure-women's second class status. But as a woman with very clear memories of high school, I understand the trauma associated with fitting in and finding love. I was not prepared for a feminist revolution at 16; I could barely deal with what the humidity did to my hair.

I wanted to find out what girls think about teen magazines nowadays, so I staged an informal survey with a group of teenagers and showed them issues of Teen, Sassy, Seventeen, and YM. Some girls criticized the magazines for being too white, too into skinny, and too superficial, but readily admitted to delighting in them anyway.

Kate Stroup from Philadelphia subscribes to Seventeen, as well as to various "adult" fashion

magazines. "I like the ads," she says. Stroup and her friends can spend hours looking at the pictures, talking about the articles, "even talking about how bad it is." She explains, "It gives us something to bond over."

Girls looking for something easy and entertaining are sure to find it within the pages of teen magazines. Just as I lapped up celebrity gossip while researching this story, the girls I spoke with see no harm in learning a stupid hair trick.

Some girls read them for tips on navigating the social scene and dealing with relationships. "Sometimes I like to read about what guys say, not saying that I would actually follow their advice," says Kenya Hooks of Memphis.

But Roshanda Betts from Dallas no longer reads teen magazines. "I can't relate to them and I don't really think that they are made for me." She says, referring to the unrealistic size requirements for girls, racist definitions of beauty, and what she sees as the magazines' self-contradictions. "They have articles talking about, 'You should love yourself for who you are, and then they have the seven day diet.'"

The girls all like Seventeen's "School Zone," which each month features six pages of photos and quotes from different high school and which, according to Betts, "shows the spectrum of what's really happening." It's the only place in any of the magazines where kids from various racial and ethnic

backgrounds, with "imperfect" shapes and "flawed" complexions, are portrayed in all their splendor. "School Zone" puts the rest of the images in the magazine to shame merely by providing a glimpse of truth.

In the articles, reality often comes in the form of real life stories injected into each magazine, it seems, to scare the hell out of the girl reading it. We can choose from "one girl's battle with depression," another's physically abusive relationship, the story of a woman who sank to 55 pounds, a girl who was "raped, shot, and left for dead," and many more. Without some analysis or a context in which to place these stories (why did she starve herself? How can we avert these tragedies?) they are nothing more than tales of tabloid horror.

Several months' worth of Teen, Seventeen, YM, and Sassy left me with a blur of contradictory messages about how to navigate life as an adolescent girl. The sum of it is this: be pretty, but not so pretty that you intimidate boys, threaten other girls, or attract inappropriate suitors, such as teachers, bosses, fathers, and rapists; be smart, but not so smart that you intimidate boys or that, god forbid, you miss the prom to study for finals; be athletic, but not so athletic that you intimidate boys or lead people to believe that you are aggressive, asexual, or (gasp!) a lesbian or bisexual; be happy with yourself, but not if you're fat, ugly, poor, gay,

disabled, antisocial, or can't at least pass as white.

The creators of teen magazines claim to reflect the reality of girls' lives; they say that they are giving the girls what the girls say they want, and the thing is in a lot of ways, they are. But filling girls full of fluff and garbage-under the pretense that this is their reality is patronizing, cowardly, and just plain wrong. Magazines that pride themselves on teaching girls beauty tips to "hide what they hate" ought to stop reflecting a reality marred by double standard and racist ignorance and start changing it.

The biggest challenge for me while writing this piece and revisiting the ghosts of my teendom was to admit that I like this stuff-stories about boys, fashion, celebrity gossip too. But I still maintain that you can give girls "what they want" and leave out the dangerous messages. I understand the tremendous pressures that editors deal with from parents and advertisers, but I still want articles about lesbian and bisexual youth that aren't in the problems pages, and some cultural analysis behind even the celebrity stories.

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## Part II: What women want to feel?

The follow excerpt describes the empty feeling that makes many women depressed and wonder what they truly want.

The Feminine Mystique: Chapter 1

### **"The Problem that Has No Name"**

**Betty Friedan**

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches

with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night--she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question--"Is this all?"

For over fifteen years there was no word of this yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, in all the columns, books and articles by experts telling women their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers. Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire--no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity. Experts told them how to catch a man and keep him, how to breastfeed children and handle their toilet training, how to cope with sibling rivalry and adolescent rebellion; how to buy a dishwasher, bake bread, cook gourmet snails, and build a swimming pool with their own hands; how to dress, look, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting; how to keep their husbands from dying young and their sons from growing into delinquents. They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights--the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for. Some women, in their forties and fifties, still remembered painfully giving up those dreams, but most of the younger women no longer even thought about them. A thousand expert voices applauded their femininity, their adjustment, their new maturity. All they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children.

By the end of the nineteen-fifties, the average marriage age of women in America dropped to 20, and was still dropping, into the teens. Fourteen million girls were engaged by 17. The proportion of women attending college in comparison with men dropped from 47 per cent in 1920 to 35 per cent in 1958. A century earlier, women had fought for higher education; now girls went to college to get a husband. By the mid-fifties, 60 per cent dropped out of college to marry, or because they were afraid too much education would be a marriage bar. Colleges built dormitories for "married students," but the students were almost always the husbands. A new degree was instituted for the wives--"Ph.T." (Putting Husband Through).

Then American girls began getting married in high school. And the women's magazines, deploring the unhappy statistics about these young marriages, urged that courses on marriage, and marriage counselors, be installed in the high schools. Girls started going steady at twelve and thirteen, in junior high. Manufacturers put out brassieres with false bosoms of foam rubber for little girls of ten. And on advertisement for a child's dress, sizes 3-6x, in the New York Times in the fall of 1960, said: "She Too Can Join the Man-Trap Set."

By the end of the fifties, the United States birthrate was overtaking India's. The birth-control movement, renamed Planned Parenthood, was asked to find a method whereby women who had been advised that a third or fourth baby would be born dead or defective might have it anyhow. Statisticians were especially astounded at the fantastic increase in the number of babies among college women.



Where once they had two children, now they had four, five, six. Women who had once wanted careers were now making careers out of having babies. So rejoiced Life magazine in a 1956 paean to the movement of American women back to the home.

In a New York hospital, a woman had a nervous breakdown when she found she could not breastfeed her baby. In other hospitals, women dying of cancer refused a drug which research had proved might save their lives: its side effects were said to be unfeminine. "If I have only one life, let me live it as a blonde," a larger-than-life- sized picture of a pretty, vacuous woman proclaimed from newspaper, magazine, and drugstore ads. And across America, three out of every ten women dyed their hair blonde. They ate a chalk called Metrecal, instead of food, to shrink to the size of the thin young models. Department-store buyers reported that American women, since 1939, had become three and four sizes smaller. "Women are out to fit the clothes, instead of vice-versa," one buyer said.

Interior decorators were designing kitchens with mosaic murals and original paintings, for kitchens were once again the center of women's lives. Home sewing became a million-dollar industry. Many women no longer left their homes, except to shop, chauffeur their children, or attend a social engagement with their husbands. Girls were growing up in America without ever having jobs outside the home. In the late fifties, a sociological phenomenon was suddenly remarked: a third of American women now worked, but most were no longer young and

very few were pursuing careers. They were married women who held part-time jobs, selling or secretarial, to put their husbands through school, their sons through college, or to help pay the mortgage. Or they were widows supporting families. Fewer and fewer women were entering professional work. The shortages in the nursing, social work, and teaching professions caused crises in almost every American city. Concerned over the Soviet Union's lead in the space race, scientists noted that America's greatest source of unused brain-power was women. But girls would not study physics: it was "unfeminine." A girl refused a science fellowship at Johns Hopkins to take a job in a real-estate office. All she wanted, she said, was what every other American girl wanted--to get married, have four children and live in a nice house in a nice suburb.

The suburban housewife--she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world. The American housewife--freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment. As a housewife and mother, she was respected as a full and equal partner to man in his world. She was free to choose automobiles, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of.

In the fifteen years after World War II, this mystique of

feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture. Millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their station wagonful of children at school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor. They baked their own bread, sewed their own and their children's clothes, kept their new washing machines and dryers running all day. They changed the sheets on the beds twice a week instead of once, took the rug-hoag class in adult education, and pitied their poor frustrated mothers, who had dreamed of having a career. Their only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers; their highest ambition to have five children and a beautiful house, their only fight to get and keep their husbands. They had no thought for the unfeminine problems of the world outside the home; they wanted the men to make the major decisions. They gloried in their role as women, and wrote proudly on the census blank: "Occupation: housewife."

For over fifteen years, the words written for women, and the words women used when they talked to each other, while their husbands sat on the other side of the room and talked shop or politics or septic tanks, were about problems with their children, or how to keep their husbands happy, or improve their children's school, or cook chicken or make slipcovers. Nobody argued whether women were inferior or superior to men; they were simply different. Words like "emancipation" and "career" sounded strange and embarrassing; no one had used them for

years. When a Frenchwoman named Simone de Beauvoir wrote a book called *The Second Sex*, an American critic commented that she obviously "didn't know what life was all about," and besides, she was talking about French women. The "woman problem" in America no longer existed.

If a woman had a problem in the 1950's and 1960's, she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage, or with herself. Other women were satisfied with their lives, she thought. What kind of a woman was she if she did not feel this mysterious fulfillment waxing the kitchen floor? She was so ashamed to admit her dissatisfaction that she never knew how many other women shared it. If she tried to tell her husband, he didn't understand what she was talking about. She did not really understand it herself.

For over fifteen years women in America found it harder to talk about the problem than about sex. Even the psychoanalysts had no name for it. When a woman went to a psychiatrist for help, as many women did, she would say, "I'm so ashamed," or "I must be hopelessly neurotic." "I don't know what's wrong with women today," a suburban psychiatrist said uneasily. "I only know something is wrong because most of my patients happen to be women. And their problem isn't sexual." Most women with this problem did not go to see a psychoanalyst, however. "There's nothing wrong really," they kept telling themselves, "There isn't any problem."

But on an April morning in 1959, I heard a mother of four, having coffee with four other mothers in a

suburban development fifteen miles from New York, say in a tone of quiet desperation, "the problem." And the others knew, without words, that she was not talking about a problem with her husband, or her children, or her home. Suddenly they realized they all shared the same problem, the problem that has no name. They began, hesitantly, to talk about it. Later, after they had picked up their children at nursery school and taken them home to nap, two of the women cried, in sheer relief, just to know they were not alone.

Gradually I came to realize that the problem that has no name was shared by countless women in America. As a magazine writer I often interviewed women about problems with their children, or their marriages, or their houses, or their communities. But after a while I began to recognize the telltale signs of this other problem. I saw the same signs in suburban ranch houses and split-levels on Long Island and in New Jersey and Westchester County; in colonial houses in a small Massachusetts town; on patios in Memphis; in suburban and city apartments; in living rooms in the Midwest. Sometimes I sensed the problem, not as a reporter, but as a suburban housewife, for during this time I was also bringing up my own three children in Rockland County, New York. I heard echoes of the problem in college dormitories and semiprivate maternity wards, at PTA meetings and luncheons of the League of Women Voters, at suburban cocktail parties, in station wagons waiting for trains, and in snatches of conversation overheard at Schrafft's. The groping words I heard from other women, on quiet afternoons when children were at school or on quiet

evenings when husbands worked late, I think I understood first as a woman long before I understood their larger social and psychological implications.

Just what was this problem that has no name? What were the words women used when they tried to express it? Sometimes a woman would say "I feel empty somehow . . . incomplete." Or she would say, "I feel as if I don't exist." Sometimes she blotted out the feeling with a tranquilizer. Sometimes she thought the problem was with her husband or her children, or that what she really needed was to redecorate her house, or move to a better neighborhood, or have an affair, or another baby. Sometimes, she went to a doctor with symptoms she could hardly describe: "A tired feeling. . . I get so angry with the children it scares me . . . I feel like crying without any reason." (A Cleveland doctor called it "the housewife's syndrome.") A number of women told me about great bleeding blisters that break out on their hands and arms. "I call it the house wife's blight" said a family doctor in Pennsylvania. "I see it so often lately in these young women with four, five and six children who bury themselves in their dishpans. But it isn't caused by detergent and it isn't cured by cortisone."

Sometimes a woman would tell me that the feeling gets so strong she runs out of the house and walks through the streets. Or she stays inside her house and cries. Or her children tell her a joke, and she doesn't laugh because she doesn't hear it. I talked to women who had spent years on the analyst's couch, working out their "adjustment to the feminine role," their blocks to

"fulfillment as a wife and mother." But the desperate tone in these women's voices, and the look in their eyes, was the same as the tone and the look of other women, who were sure they had no problem, even though they did have a strange feeling of desperation.

A mother of four who left college at nineteen to get married told me:

I've tried everything women are supposed to do--hobbies, gardening, pickling, canning, being very social with my neighbors, joining committees, running PTA teas. I can do it all, and I like it, but it doesn't leave you anything to think about--any feeling of who you are. I never had any career ambitions. All I wanted was to get married and have four children. I love the kids and Bob and my home. There's no problem you can even put a name to. But I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I'm a server of food and putter-on of pants and a bed maker, somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I?

A twenty-three-year-old mother in blue jeans said:

I ask myself why I'm so dissatisfied. I've got my health, fine children, a lovely new home, enough money. My husband has a real future as an electronics engineer. He doesn't have any of these feelings. He says maybe I need a vacation, let's go to New York for a weekend. But that isn't it. I always had this idea we should do everything together. I can't sit down and read a book alone. If the children are napping and I have one hour to myself I just walk through the house waiting for them to

wake up. I don't make a move until I know where the rest of the crowd is going. It's as if ever since you were a little girl, there's always been somebody or something that will take care of your life: your parents, or college, or falling in love, or having a child, or moving to a new house. Then you wake up one morning and there's nothing to look forward to.

A young wife in a Long Island development said:

I seem to sleep so much. I don't know why I should be so tired. This house isn't nearly so hard to clean as the cold-water Hat we had when I was working. The children are at school all day. It's not the work. I just don't feel alive.

In 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a boil through the image of the happy American housewife. In the television commercials the pretty housewives still beamed over their foaming dishpans and Time's cover story on "The Suburban Wife, an American Phenomenon" protested: "Having too good a time . . . to believe that they should be unhappy." But the actual unhappiness of the American housewife was suddenly being reported--from the New York Times and Newsweek to Good Housekeeping and CBS Television ("The Trapped Housewife"), although almost everybody who talked about it found some superficial reason to dismiss it. It was attributed to incompetent appliance repairmen (New York Times), or the distances children must be chauffeured in the suburbs (Time), or too much PTA (Redbook). Some said it was the old problem--education: more and more women had education, which naturally

made them unhappy in their role as housewives. "The road from Freud to Frigidaire, from Sophocles to Spock, has turned out to be a bumpy one," reported the New York Times (June 28, 1960). "Many young women--certainly not all--whose education plunged them into a world of ideas feel stifled in their homes. They find their routine lives out of joint with their training. Like shut-ins, they feel left out. In the last year, the problem of the educated housewife has provided the meat of dozens of speeches made by troubled presidents of women's colleges who maintain, in the face of complaints, that sixteen years of academic training is realistic preparation for wifehood and motherhood."

There was much sympathy for the educated housewife. ("Like a two-headed schizophrenic . . . once she wrote a paper on the Graveyard poets; now she writes notes to the milkman. Once she determined the boiling point of sulphuric acid; now she determine s her boiling point with the overdue repairman....The housewife often is reduced to screams and tears.... No one, it seems, is appreciative, least of all herself, of the kind of person she becomes in the process of turning from poetess into shrew.")

Home economists suggested more realistic preparation for housewives, such as high-school workshops in home appliances. College educators suggested more discussion groups on home management and the family, to prepare women for the adjustment to domestic life. A spate of articles appeared in the mass magazines offering "Fifty-eight Ways to Make Your

Marriage More Exciting." No month went by without a new book by a psychiatrist or sexologist offering technical advice on finding greater fulfillment through sex.

A male humorist joked in Harper's Bazaar (July, 1960) that the problem could be solved by taking away woman's right to vote. ("In the pre-19th Amendment era, the American woman was placid, sheltered and sure of her role in American society. She left all the political decisions to her husband and he, in turn, left all the family decisions to her. Today a woman has to make both the family and the political decisions, and it's too much for her.")

A number of educators suggested seriously that women no longer be admitted to the four-year colleges and universities: in the growing college crisis, the education which girls could not use as housewives was more urgently needed than ever by boys to do the work of the atomic age.

The problem was also dismissed with drastic solutions no one could take seriously,. (A woman writer proposed in Harper's that women be drafted for compulsory service as nurses' aides and baby-sitters.) And it was smoothed over with the age-old panaceas: "love is their answer," "the only answer is inner help," "the secret of completeness--children," "a private means of intellectual fulfillment," "to cure this toothache of the spirit--the simple formula of handling one's self and one's will over to God."1

The problem was dismissed by telling the

housewife she doesn't realize how lucky she is--her own boss, no time clock, no junior executive gunning for her job. What if she isn't happy--does she think men are happy in this world? Does she really, secretly, still want to be a man? Doesn't she know yet how lucky she is to be a woman?

The problem was also, and finally, dismissed by shrugging that there are NO solutions: this is what being a woman means, and what is wrong with American women that they can't accept their role gracefully? As Newsweek put it (March 7, 1960):

She is dissatisfied with a lot that women of other lands can only dream of. Her discontent is deep, pervasive, and impervious to the superficial remedies which are offered at every hand.... An army of professional explorers have already charted the major sources of trouble.... From the beginning of time, the female cycle has defined and confined woman's role. As Freud was credited with saying: "Anatomy is destiny." Though no group of women has ever pushed these natural restrictions as far as the American wife, it seems that she still cannot accept them with good grace.... A young mother with a beautiful family, charm, talent and brains is apt to dismiss her role apologetically. "What do I do?" you hear her say. Why nothing. I'm just a housewife." A good education, it seems, has given this paragon among women an understanding of the value of everything except her own worth. . .

And so she must accept the fact that "American women's unhappiness is merely the most recently won of

women's rights," and adjust and say with the happy housewife found by Newsweek: "We ought to salute the wonderful freedom we all have and be proud of our lives today. I have had college and I've worked, but being a housewife is the most rewarding and satisfying role.... My mother was never included in my father's business affairs. . . she couldn't get out of the house and away from us children. But I am an equal to my husband; I can go along with him on business trips and to social business affairs."

The alternative offered was a choice that few women would contemplate. In the sympathetic words of the New York Times: "All admit to being deeply frustrated at times by the lack of privacy, the physical burden, the routine of family life, the confinement of it. However, none would give up her home and family if she had the choice to make again." Redbook commented: "Few women would want to thumb their noses at husbands, children and community and go off on their own. Those who do may be talented individuals, but they rarely are successful women."

The year American women's discontent boiled over, it was also reported (Look) that the more than 21,000,000 American women who are single, widowed, or divorced do not cease even after fifty their frenzied, desperate search for a man. And the search begins early--for seventy per cent of all American women now marry before they are twenty-four. A pretty twenty-five-year-old secretary took thirty-five different jobs in six months in the futile hope of finding a husband. Women were moving

from one political club to another, taking evening courses in accounting or sailing, learning to play golf or ski, joining a number of churches in succession, going to bars alone, in their ceaseless search for a man.

Of the growing thousands of women currently getting private psychiatric help in the United States, the married ones were reported dissatisfied with their marriages, the unmarried ones suffering from anxiety and, finally, depression. Strangely, a number of psychiatrists stated that, in their experience, unmarried women patients were happier than married ones. So the door of all those pretty suburban houses opened a crack to permit a glimpse of uncounted thousands of American housewives who suffered alone from a problem that suddenly everyone was talking about, and beginning to take for granted, as one of those unreal problems in American life that can never be solved-like the hydrogen bomb. By 1962 the plight of the trapped American housewife had become a national parlor game. Whole issues of magazines, newspaper columns, books learned and frivolous, educational conferences and television panels were devoted to the problem.

Even so, most men, and some women, still did not know that this problem was real. But those who had faced it honestly knew that all the superficial remedies, the sympathetic advice, the scolding words and the cheering words were somehow drowning the problem in unreality. A bitter laugh was beginning to be heard from American women. They were admired, envied, pitied, theorized over until they were sick of it, offered drastic solutions or silly

choices that no one could take seriously. They got all kinds of advice from the growing armies of marriage and child-guidance counselors, psychotherapists, and armchair psychologists, on how to adjust to their role as housewives. No other road to fulfillment was offered to American women in the middle of the twentieth century. Most adjusted to their role and suffered or ignored the problem that has no name. It can be less painful for a woman, not to hear the strange, dissatisfied voice stirring within her.

It is NO longer possible to ignore that voice, to dismiss the desperation of so many American women. This is not what being a woman means, no matter what the experts say. For human suffering there is a reason; perhaps the reason has not been found because the right questions have not been asked, or pressed far enough. I do not accept the answer that there is no problem because American women have luxuries that women in other times and lands never dreamed of; part of the strange newness of the problem is that it cannot be understood in terms of the age-old material problems of man: poverty, sickness, hunger, cold. The women who suffer this problem have a hunger that food cannot fill. It persists in women whose husbands are struggling intern and law clerks, or prosperous doctors and lawyers; in wives of workers and executives who make \$5,000 a year or \$50,000. It is not caused by lack of material advantages; it may not even be felt by women preoccupied with desperate problems of hunger, poverty or illness. And women who think it will be solved by more money, a bigger house, a second car, moving to a better suburb,

often discover it gets worse.

It is no longer possible today to blame the problem on loss of femininity: to say that education and independence and equality with men have made American women unfeminine. I have heard so many women try to deny this dissatisfied voice within themselves because it does not fit the pretty picture of femininity the experts have given them. I think, in fact, that this is the first clue to the mystery; the problem cannot be understood in the generally accepted terms by which scientists have studied women, doctors have treated them, counselors have advised them, and writers have written about them. Women who suffer this problem, in whom this voice is stirring, have lived their whole lives in the pursuit of feminine fulfillment. They are not career women (although career women may have other problems); they are women whose greatest ambition has been marriage and children. For the oldest of these women, these daughters of the American middle class, no other dream was possible. The ones in their forties and fifties who once had other dreams gave them up and threw themselves joyously into life as housewives. For the youngest, the new wives and mothers, this was the only dream. They are the ones who quit high school and college to marry, or marked time in some job in which they had no real interest until they married. These women are very "feminine" in the usual sense, and yet they still suffer the problem.

Are the women who finished college, the women who once had dreams beyond housewifery, the ones who

suffer the most? According to the experts they are, but listen to these four women:

My days are all busy, and dull, too. All I ever do is mess around. I get up at eight--I make breakfast, so I do the dishes, have lunch, do some more dishes, and some laundry and cleaning in the afternoon. Then it's supper dishes and I get to sit down a few minutes, before the children have to be sent to bed. . . That's all there is to my day. It's just like any other wife's day. Humdrum. The biggest time, I am chasing kids.

Ye Gods, what do I do with my time? Well, I get up at six. I get my son dressed and then give him breakfast. After that I wash dishes and bathe and feed the baby. Then I get lunch and while the children nap, I sew or mend or iron and do all the other things I can't get done before noon. Then I cook supper for the family and my husband watches TV while I do the dishes. After I get the children to bed, I set my hair and then I go to bed.

The problem is always being the children's mommy, or the minister's wife and never being myself.

A film made of any typical morning in my house would look like an old Marx Brothers' comedy. I wash the dishes, rush the older children off to school, dash out in the yard to cultivate the chrysanthemums, run back in to make a phone call about a committee meeting, help the youngest child build a blockhouse, spend fifteen minutes skimming the newspapers so I can be well-informed, then scamper down to the washing machines where my thrice-weekly laundry includes enough clothes to keep a



primitive village going for an entire year. By noon I'm ready for a padded cell. Very little of what I've done has been really necessary or important. Outside pressures lash me through the day. Yet I look upon myself as one of the more relaxed housewives in the neighborhood. Many of my friends are even more frantic. In the past sixty years we have come full circle and the American housewife is once again trapped in a squirrel cage. If the cage is now a modern plateglass -and-broadloom ranch house or a convenient modern apartment, the situation is no less painful than when her grandmother sat over an embroidery hoop in her gilt-end-plush parlor and muttered angrily about women's rights.

The first two women never went to college. They live in developments in Levittown, New Jersey, and Tacoma, Washington, and were interviewed by a team of sociologists studying workingmen's wives. 2 The third, a minister's wife, wrote on the fifteenth reunion questionnaire of her college that she never had any career ambitions, but wishes now she had. The fourth, who has a Ph.D. in anthropology, is today a Nebraska housewife with three children.. Their words seem to indicate that housewives of all educational levels suffer the same feeling of desperation.

The fact is that NO one today is muttering angrily about "women's rights," even though more and more women have gone to college. In a recent study of all the classes that have graduated from Barnard College, a significant minority of earlier graduates blamed their education for making them want "rights," later classes

blamed their education for giving them career dreams, but recent graduates blamed the college for making them feel it was not enough simply to be a housewife and mother; they did not want to feel guilty if they did not read books or take part in community activities. But if education is not the cause of the problem, the fact that education somehow festers in these women may be a clue.

If the secret of feminine fulfillment is having children, never have many women, with the freedom to choose, had so many children in so few years, so willingly. If the answer is love, never have women marched for love with such determination. And yet there is a growing suspicion that the problem may not be sexual, though it must somehow relate to sex. I have heard from many doctors evidence of new sexual problems between man and wife--sexual hunger in wives so that their husbands cannot satisfy it. "We have made women a sex attire," said a psychiatrist at the Margaret Sanger marriage counseling clinic. "She has no identity except as a wife and mother. She does know who she is herself. She waits all day for her husband to come home at night to make her feel alive. And now it is the husband who is interested. It is terrible for the women, to lie there, night after night, tiny for her husband to make her feel alive." Why is there such a market for books and articles offering sexual advice? The kind of sexual orgasm which Kinsey found in statistical plenitude in the recent generations of American women does not seem to make this problem go away.

On the contrary, new neuroses are being seen

among women--and problems as yet unnamed as neuroses--which Freud and his followers did not predict, with physical symptoms, anxieties, and defense mechanisms equal to those caused by sexual repression. And strange new problems are being reported in the growing generations of children whose mothers were always there, driving them around, helping them with their homework--an inability to endure pain or discipline or pursue any self-sustained goal of any sort, a devastating boredom with life. Educators are increasingly uneasy about the dependence, the lack of self-reliance, of the boys and girls who are entering college today. "We fight a continual battle to make our students assume manhood," said a Columbia dean.

A White House conference was held on the physical and muscular deterioration of American children: were they being over-nurtured? Sociologists noted the astounding organization of suburban children's lives: the lessons, parties, entertainments, play and study groups organized for them. A suburban housewife in Portland, Oregon, wondered why the children "need" Brownies and Boy Scouts out here. "This is not the slums. The kids out here have the great outdoors. I think people are so bored. they organize the children, and then try to hook ever' one else on it. And the poor kids have no time left just to lie on their beds and daydream."

Can the problem that has no name be somehow related to the domesroutine of the housewife? When a woman tries to put the problem into words, she often merely describes the daily life she leads. What is there in

this recital of comfortable domestic detail that could possibly cause such a feeling of desperation? Is she trapped simply by the enormous demands of her role as modern housewife: wife, mistress, mother, nurse, consumer, cook, chauffeur, expert on interior decoration child care, appliance repair, furniture refinishing, nutrition, and education? Her day is fragmented as she rushes from dishwasher to washing machine to telephone to dryer to station wagon to supermarket, and delivers Johnny to the Little League field, takes Janey to dancing class, gets the lawnmower fixed and meets the 6:45. She can never spend more than 15 minutes on any one thing; she has no time to read books, only magazines; even if she had time, she has lost the power to concentrate. At the end of the day, she is so terribly tired that sometimes her husband has to take over and put the children to bed.

Thus terrible tiredness took so many women to doctors in the 1950's that one decided to investigate it. He found, surprisingly, that his patients suffering from "housewife's fatigue" slept more than an adult needed to sleep -as much as ten hours a day- and that the actual energy they expended on housework did not tax their capacity. The real problem must be something else, he decided-perhaps boredom. Some doctors told their women patients they must get out of the house for a day, treat themselves to a movie in town. Others prescribed tranquilizers. Many suburban housewives were taking tranquilizers like cough drops. You wake up in the morning, and you feel as if there's no point in going on another day like this. So you take a tranquilizer because it makes you not care so much that it's pointless."

It is easy to see the concrete details that trap the suburban housewife, the continual demands on her time. But the chains that bind her in her trap are chains in her own mind and spirit. They are chains made up of mistaken ideas and misinterpreted facts, of incomplete truths and unreal choices. They are not easily seen and not easily shaken off.

How can any woman see the whole truth within the bounds of her own life? How can she believe that voice inside herself, when it denies the conventional, accepted truths by which she has been living? And yet the women I have talked to, who are finally listening to that inner voice, seem in some incredible way to be groping through to a truth that has defied the experts.

I think the experts in a great many fields have been holding pieces of that truth under their microscopes for a long time without realizing it. I found pieces of it in certain new research and theoretical developments in psychological, social and biological science whose implications for women seem never to have been examined. I found many clues by talking to suburban doctors, gynecologists, obstetricians, child-guidance clinicians, pediatricians, high-school guidance counselors, college professors, marriage counselors, psychiatrists and ministers-questioning them not on their theories, but on their actual experience in treating American women. I became aware of a growing body of evidence, much of which has not been reported publicly because it does not fit current modes of thought about women--evidence which throws into question the standards of feminine

normality, feminine adjustment, feminine fulfillment, and feminine maturity by which most women are still trying to live.

I began to see in a strange new light the American return to early marriage and the large families that are causing the population explosion; the recent movement to natural childbirth and breastfeeding; suburban conformity, and the new neuroses, character pathologies and sexual problems being reported by the doctors. I began to see new dimensions to old problems that have long been taken for granted among women: menstrual difficulties, sexual frigidity, promiscuity, pregnancy fears, childbirth depression, the high incidence of emotional breakdown and suicide among women in their twenties and thirties, the menopause crises, the so-called passivity and immaturity of American men, the discrepancy between women's tested intellectual abilities in childhood and their adult achievement, the changing incidence of adult sexual orgasm in American women, and persistent problems in psychotherapy and in women's education.

If I am right, the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity. It is far more important than anyone recognizes. It is the key to these other new and old problems which have been torturing women and their husbands and children, and puzzling their doctors and educators for years. It may well be the key to our future as a nation and a culture. We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: "I want something

more than my husband and my children and my home."

## NOTES

1. See the Seventy-fifth Anniversary Issue of Good Housekeeping, May, 1960, "The Gift of Self," a symposium by Margaret Mead, Jessamyn West, et al.
  2. Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, *Workingman's Wife*, New York, 1959.
  3. Betty Friedan, "If One Generation Can Ever Tell Another," *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, Northampton, Mass., Winter, 1961. I first became aware of "the problem that has no name" and its possible relationship to what I finally called "the feminine mystique" in 1957, when I prepared an intensive questionnaire and conducted a survey of my own Smith College classmates fifteen years after graduation. This questionnaire was later used by alumnae classes of Radcliffe and other women's colleges with similar results.
  4. Jhan and June Robbins, "Why Young Mothers Feel Trapped," *Redbook*, September, 1960.
  5. Marian Freda Poverman, "Alumnae on Parade," *Barnard Alumnae Magazine*, July, 1957.
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Perhaps the most interesting line in the entire essay is when the woman claim "I feel as if I don't exist." The significance of this line, summarized the entire essay as well as answered the question of what women want to feel. They want to feel alive, that they matter, that they are needed, all in all, the feeling of not existing and losing their personal identity is suffocating. This sense of "need," is manifested almost in every women with different approaches. Some women devoted their entire life to their children and family, some excelled in their careers, some sleeps with man for affection, volunteer to end world hunger, or even cheat on their husbands. Women will go to great extents to feel important. Very often with this sense of losing one's identity combined with neglect from their husbands. Women searched alternative ways to feel alive and important. In a recent Newsweek article, "The secrete Lives of Wives". It discussed the new social trend of more and more women cheating. Although very few of them ever expected it, the situation often provided their only way out of these feelings. The point is obvious, the need to feel important and alive is what many of them crave. If you need a prove of how many lonely wives there are just go to google and type in "lonely wives."

To summarize, all of women's actions are controlled by two factors, their **fears** and their

**desires.** Their fear includes being abused by their spouse and the fear of rejection. Their desires includes the need to feel important, to feel needed, and to feel alive. Unfortunately, their fears almost always conflict with their desires. They want to be important, but they also want the society to accept them. They want to enjoy food but they don't want to look fat. They want to look sexy, but they don't want to be called a slut. These factors are real and they control how women view the world. As a I will discuss some examples in later sections.

## **Why are women so complicated for men**

Now that we have a better understanding of women's history, let's shift the perspective towards men. So why do men baffle over minds of women. For one obvious reason, most men do not understand women's history. Without this understanding, men would not comprehend the premises women use to derive all their actions. Another major reason is that most men lack the ability to put themselves in women's shoe. They try to justify women's mind through men's eyes. Men often use themselves as a reference point to conclude other's emotions. An adult male friend of mine once had a huge argument with me over the issue of rape. He claimed that he did not understand why rape is so bad since he himself would not mind to be raped by women. Even if it was an unattractive women, he admitted that he would still find pleasure in such an event. Also he always thought little boys molested by their sexy teachers as very lucky. From his perspective, he convinced himself that women *too* must find pleasure in rape. They simply don't admit it because it is not socially acceptable. Even after spending hours explaining to him the

psychological trauma , he still has a hard time grasping the different perspective.

Like I have mentioned from the previous sections. To understand women, you must first understand their history. Once the history is understood, you must understand the two factors that controls every women, their *fears* and their *desires*.

Now I will present several cases where confusion often occur between men and women. I will present both party's perspective and derive all that goes through women's mind with the two factors we have discussed so far.

#### CASE 1:

The fear of being abused or hurt is obvious. Nobody wants a black eye or get dumped as soon as you fall in love with someone. Ron Louis in his book "How to succeed with women" provides a perfect example.

"...former lover named Dawn, She is 24 years old, long blond hair, big blue eyes, tall, great legs, a huge chest, and loves to wear seductive clothes. She also loves sex, hot sex for hours. In short, Dawn embodies many men's fantasies. Before dating one of the authors she used to go out and flirt with guys at bars. She told us about entering a bar and seeing how the men would stop talking and stare at her, drooling like dogs. She said she enjoyed the attention, but she rarely gave out her phone number to or dated any of the men who came onto her in

bars. Why? Because she was afraid. She would be attracted to a man and then get afraid of being physically abused or raped by him. After all, she didn't know him; she just met him at the bar. So she'd stay distant, unattainable by the many men who desired her.

Fear of being abused, hurt or raped by men is the biggest concern women have in dating. Dawn and most other women smartly scope out men to make sure they won't be physically hurt by the men they date. They want to be sure they can trust the men they are attracted to before getting physically vulnerable with them.

If you want to have success with women, you must be aware of this most basic female concern. You must deal with the fact that women you meet will be testing you to see if you are "safe," or potentially violent.

We think this concern makes total sense. If we were women we would have the same concerns, and so would you. Put yourself in a woman's position: if you became aware of stories of rape, spousal abuse, torture and murder of women every day in newspapers and on TV, you'd be paranoid, too. Women need to be a bit paranoid because so many men are psycho. It simply isn't worth the risk for a woman to go home with a man who could hurt her....."

#### CASE 2:

Any man that has ever tried to pick up a women will have encountered the two types of women I'm about to describe. They call the first type lead ons because they lead men on by being open and friendly. But unfortunately friendship is all the poor guy will ever get. This type is by far the most frustrating and confusing women for men. Again

going back to the idea that men uses themselves as the reference point of the world. Most men will only accept “**getting to know**” a woman if and only if they are already attracted and expected to gain something out of it. (I said most not all) Therefore a women willing to spent their time with a guy but not willing to enter a relationship, or *i just want to be friends*, is complete farce and makes no sense. This is also a very defeating feeling since they felt they had read the signs correctly.

Now, how do women see this situation. Let us also go back to what I have mentioned. Making friends and **being accepted** by their peers are important to women. Notice no where in the previous line involved mentioning of a boyfriend. Boy are important but they are by no means the only reason for women to make friends. By making friends they expects emotional support and rarely immediate sexual gratification. It is definitely possible that their initial intention was to get to know you better and evolve a relationship out of it but it is also possible that they realized you are a better friend. Their fear also prevent them from getting too close to quickly because they might come to the conclusion that the guy only wanted sex. The result? The harder the guy pursuit a relationship the more withdrawn women become. In the end the guy tends to feel cheated, embarrassed and deceived to the final conclusion of stopping any interaction altogether.

## 4 types of men and how they view women

To begin this section, let me first clarify that the term “nice” is only relative. Everybody acts according to their interest depending on their assets. A man that cannot get a girlfriend may claim that he would treat any girl like a goddess. This does not necessary make him a nice guy since this might not be the case if getting women weren't an issue. I have known a lot of girlfriendless guys that are not so nice.

To understand the interaction between men and women from men's perspective, let me first introduce the concept of the four stages of men; desperation, confusion, manipulation, and Enlightenment. These four stages signifies the level of understanding a particular man has over women. Desperation is the first stage and it is the most primitive understanding where the guy is basically clueless. This type of men tend to concentrate all their energy on getting anything they possibly can. Getting a girlfriend is their constant top priority. The confusion stage is where most men stay their entire life. They understand women enough to interact and make friends. They lead a normal life and have girlfriends and get marry when they feel like the time

is right.

Only about one in a thousand will reach the manipulation stage. These men understand women to the point that they feel completely confident in their abilities to seduce them. They know exactly how to seduce women and do so with great pleasure. To them seducing women is a game, and an art, not a way to find love.

One in a million will reach the final stage of enlightenment. Although there really isn't any difference between manipulation and enlightenment, it is extremely difficult to reach this level. With all of the power of a master manipulator of women, the enlightenment stage requires the men to give it up completely.

## Conclusion:

What do women want from men?

Wow, if you are still reading and have understood everything so far, I trust that you would be able to answer this question by now. I have already written in many places that women want to feel excited, important, needed, sexy and wanted. All these seem simple enough, but unfortunately the creator added fear to keep women from going out of control. A woman simply wants a man that would

give her what she desires while making sure she is comfortable with the societal normal each step of the way. Desiring women is easy for men, it is the playing by the rules that's hard.

It is almost ironic when you realize how similar what men and women wanted. Who doesn't want to feel important and be accepted? Who doesn't have the fear of rejection? The only difference is the heritage and the societal standard that sets them apart. While men can freely use their body, women may not. While men can enter a relationship having relative little fear of physical abuse, women cannot.

In order for men to understand women, men must give up their self-centered nature and start seeing the world through the eyes of women. The truth is if men were subjected to as much societal pressure as women, they would probably cracked under pressure by now. Hell, I definitely will never wax my leg for any man.